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ABSTRACT

The literature on undergraduate field placement programs reveals differences in approaches to program evaluation. Included in research literature are descriptive accounts, as well as those focusing on characteristics of the program, student evaluation of field programs, or those assessing the program's influence on students. This study pre- and post-tested placement and comparison groups on four themes that were obtained from a factor analysis of the Skills Checklist of Placement Experience (SCOPE). The themes were client testing, therapeutic interaction, reporting and writing, and non-therapeutic interaction. Students (N=77) were upper class psychology majors attending universities having dissimilar undergraduate populations. Analysis of covariance revealed significant differences between placement and comparison groups on the first three activity themes. Findings support the arguments of field placement advocates who claim that placement experiences can enhance learning by emphasizing both thinking and doing. Results also support SCOPE's utility for assessing placement settings at different institutions. (Author/ABL)

Activities in Field Placement Programs at Different Universities

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Running head: FIELD PLACEMENT PROGRAMS

Abstract

The extensive writing about field placement programs includes few, thorough evaluations or comparisons of programs offered at different universities. This study pre- and posttested placement and comparison groups on four themes that we obtained from a factor analysis of the Skills Checklist of Placement Experience (SCOPE). The themes were client testing, therapeutic interaction, reporting and writing, and non therapeutic interaction. Students were 77 upper class psychology majors attending universities having dissimilar undergraduate populations. Analysis of covariance revealed significant differences between placement and comparison groups on the first three activity themes. Findings support conclusions about the role of placement experiences for acquiring experience and about SCOPE's utility for assessing placements settings at different institutions.

Activities in Field Placement Programs at Different Universities

Examination of the literature on undergraduate field placement programs reveals differences in approaches to program evaluation. Some provide descriptive accounts (Allen, 1978; Kuppersmith, Blair, & Slotnick, 1977; Moore & Bondy, 1978; Shemberg & Keeley, 1976, & VandeCreek & Thompson, 1977). Others focus on characteristics of the programs (Matthews, 1979; VandeCreek & Fleischer, 1984). Still others examine student evaluation of field placement programs (Allen, 1978; Kantrowitz, Mitchell, & Davidson, 1982; Yates, 1980) or have assessed the program's influence on students (Sherman, 1982; Kantrowitz, Mitchell & Davidson, 1982; Keller, 1979; Moore & Bondy, 1978; Nish, 1979). Few programs identified activities that students pursued during the course (Sherman, 1982). Moreover, only one study has included a control group in a pre-and posttest design, using quantitative measures of inter-and intrapersonal and career attitudes (Ware, Millard & Matthews, 1984). However, that study found only a slightly greater number of significant differences than expected by chance. The authors concluded that the focus on more stable, trait attributes contributed to the failure to find differences.

The present study compared placement and non placement groups on 4 factor analytically derived themes of experiences associated with but not peculiar to field placement settings. We also examined the performance of students enrolled at different

universities in order to increase generalization. Finally, we compared the performance of men and women and of juniors and seniors.

Method

The Programs

Field placement courses in the Psychology Departments at Creighton University and Loyola University enroll no more than 15 junior and senior psychology majors each semester. Course goals consist of providing students with a variety of experiences in service settings and informing them about contemporary issues in human/social services. Placement includes inpatient and outpatient psychiatric settings, human/social services' agencies, and a vocational assessment center. Placement activities vary depending on the setting and the particular student's skills. Professionals at the site and the instructors supervise the students.

The instructors conduct class for up to 2 hr every other week by discussing the students' placement experiences, ethical issues, and a topical film. Students prepare a statement of personal goals at the beginning of the semester and write an evaluation paper about the experience at the end of the semester. Finally, students maintain a journal describing their affective responses to the placement activities. Requirements for academic credit consist of the previously identified conditions and an average of 9 hr per week at the placement site for 3 semester hours credit.

One of the study's authors taught the course at Creighton for several years before teaching it at Loyola. During the period that the study was conducted, the Creighton instructor followed

the procedures established by the third author. The Creighton instructor was a male industrial-organizational psychologist; the Loyola instructor was a female clinical psychologist. Thus school and instructor were confounded.

Participants

Participants in the placement group consisted of 38 psychology majors enrolled in the field placement course, and participants in the comparison group consisted of 39 psychology majors enrolled in a variety of other upper level psychology courses. Thirty-nine students from Creighton and 38 students from Loyola participated. The placement group contained 24 students from Creighton and 14 students from Loyola. Creighton's psychology majors come from a population of undergraduates drawn primarily from Nebraska and Iowa (63%) and with less than 10% minority group members. Loyola's psychology majors come from a population of undergraduates drawn primarily from Louisiana (70%) and with about 20% minority group members. All students agreed to participate in the study. There were 52 women and 25 men in the study. Twenty-five students were juniors and 52 were seniors.

The use of intact groups in this study presented a selection threat to internal validity, however random assignment to groups was not possible. We examined the relationship between group assignment (placement vs. comparison) and gender; the results were not significant $\underline{X}^2(1, \underline{N} = 77) = 2.64$, $\underline{p} = .10$. The analysis of the relationship between group assignment and year in school (junior vs. senior) was also not significant, $\underline{X}$ $(1, \underline{N} = 77) = 20.66$, $\underline{p} < .001$. In addition, we analyzed the relationship between

school (Creighton vs. Loyola) and gender and found a relationship; $\underline{X}^2(1, \underline{N} = 77) = 9.52$, $\underline{p} = .002$. Inspection of the data revealed that the Creighton sample had a larger percent of men (49%) than the Loyola sample (16%). We examined the relationship between school and year in school, the results were not significant, $\underline{X}^2(1, \underline{N} = 77) = 0.10$, $\underline{p} = .75$. The results of these analysis revealed that a confounding existed between the school and gender variables. School and instructor was also confounded as described above.

We did not use data from three students in the field placement group and from four students in the comparison group because they failed to complete the posttest. Thus attrition was 8%.

Materials

An earlier investigation (Ware, Millard, & Matthews, 1984) used personality traits as the dependent variable and failed to find significant differences between students in field placements and those who were not. The present study measured specific behaviors rather than traits, using Millard and Ware's (1985) Skills Checklist of Placement Experience (SCOPE). SCOPE contains a wide variety of activities selected from student's descriptions of placement experiences in psychiatric and human/social services, industrial/organizational, and research settings.

We used the human/social services scale because in this study all students enrolled in the field placement class worked in psychiatric or human/social services settings. The scale consists of 23 items grouped according to three heuristically derived

themes, including activities involving test administration, client interactions, and client relations. Table 1 contains those items.

Insert Table 1 about here

We pre- and posttested students during the first and last week of the semester, respectively. For each item, students rated their level of proficiency on a 4-point scale ranging from none (0) to high (3). The use of self-ratings may contain distortions associated with demand characteristics and students expectations. However, our instructions emphasized the importance of candid evaluation. In addition, ratings were confidential; students could not expect to obtain a more favorable instructor evaluation by giving a higher rating of proficiency.

For purposes of the present study, we eliminated items 2 and 23 because as written they did not lend themselves to a rating of proficiency. We used principle axis factor analysis and varimax rotation on students' precourse responses to the remaining 21 items. The objective of the factor analysis was to reduce the number of items to a few themes and to compare those themes to Ware and Millard's (1985) heuristic organization of activities.

We used a conservative criterion of greater than or equal to 0.50 correlation between items and factors to decide whether to include items in a factor. Items 1 and 12 failed to load at or above the 0.50 level. Item 16 meet the 0.50 criterion on two factors. We deleted that item because of its apparent factorial complexity. We used Zwick and Velicer's (1986) recommendations

for a scree test to determine the number of factors. The result was four factors. Table 2 contains the items and their loadings, following rotation, on each of the four themes; client testing (items 3 - 7), therapeutic interaction (items 13 - 18 and 22), writing and reporting (items 19 - 21), and non-therapy client interaction (items 8 - 11). This empirically based organization of items parallels the heuristic organization, however differences exist. The most notable difference was that factor 2, therapeutic interaction, in the present study was distributed across two themes, client interactions and client relations, in the previous scheme.

Insert Table 2 about here

For the present study, we computed four composite scores by calculating the sum of self ratings on the items for each factor. Thus, there were four dependent variables corresponding to the four factors. The four measures had Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .91 (client testing), .81 (therapy interaction), .87 (writing and reporting), and .85 (nontherapy interaction)

Design and Data Analysis

The design of this study was a 2 X 2 factorial design with two levels of treatment (field placement versus comparison groups) and two levels of school (Creighton versus Loyola). Additionally we conducted separate analysis of treatment levels and gender and of treatment levels and year in school (junior vs. senior). The

dependent variables were students' composite ratings on each of the four factors. We determined that field placement and comparison groups did not differ on pretest scores for client testing, F (1, 75) = 0.38, p = .540, therapy interaction, F (1, 75) = 0.12, p = .731, writing and reporting, F (1, 75) = 1.92 p = .170, and non-therapy interaction, F (1, 75) = 1.68, p = .199.

We used analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of the posttest scores with pretest scores as the covariate. The procedure of using adjusted pretest scores "corrects for the effect of irrelevance as well as measurement error" (Cook & Cambell, 1979, p. 191-192).

The use of intact groups permits a threat to internal validity. ANCOVA is not a substitute for random assignment of participants to groups; however random assignment to groups was not possible as stated above.

Results

Analysis of covariance revealed significant differences between placement and non-placement groups on the first three activity themes: client testing $F(1, 72) = 17.74$, $p < .001$, therapy interaction $F(1, 72) = 39.54$, $p < .001$, and writing and reporting $F(1, 72) = 7.42$, $p = .008$. Students in the placement group had higher scores than those in the comparison group. Table 3 contains postest means and standard deviations for the two groups. There was no significant difference in non-therapy interaction, $F(1, 72) = 1.96$, $p = .166$, between the treatment groups.

Insert Table 3 about here

Analysis of covariance also revealed significant differences in client testing scores for the school $F(1, 72) = 5.85$, $p = .018$ and gender $F(1, 72) = 4.77$, $p = .032$ variables. Students at Creighton had higher client-testing ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 4.52$) scores than those at Loyola ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 3.40$). Men had higher client-testing scores than women ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 4.47$ vs. $M = 3.73$, $SD = 4.26$). We found no significant interactions.

Discussion

The present study's attempt to conduct a data-based evaluation is consistent with Matthew's (1982) recommendation about major educational goals in psychology for the 1980s. The results of this study identified four activity themes or that students experienced by participating in the field placement course. Consequently we discovered that field placement students reported experiences involving client testing (e.g., completing psychological tests), therapeutic interaction (e.g., participated in therapy), writing and reporting (e.g., wrote recommendations), but not non-therapy client interactions (e.g., interacted with clients on field trips).

One limitation in this study was the use of student's self-reports of placement activities. Critics may properly question the adequacy of these self-reports and whether students' evaluations would be consistent with those of their supervisors. This study

stands as an initial effort to examine systematically the impact of field placements, and it points to the need for additional research using supervisors' as well as students' observations. A second limitation was the study's use of intact groups (field placement vs. comparison groups) and the accompanying selection threat to internal validity. That the treatment, year in school, and gender groups did not differ at the outset on the four dependent measures reduces but does not eliminate our concerns about threats to internal validity.

The results also revealed a difference in client testing between Creighton and Loyola students and between men and women. One explanation is that there exists a difference between the schools' students and between the sexes. An alternative explanation is that differences resulted from the confounding between school and sex. Recall that we found a relationship between school and sex with Creighton having a disproportionately larger number of men than Loyola. Finally, the significant differences between schools and sex may be the combined product of both variables and the confounding between the two. Additional research is needed to clarify the role of school and sex differences involving client testing.

The results of the present study support the arguments by field placement advocates, who claim that placement experiences can enhance learning by emphasizing both thinking and doing (Ware & Millard, 1987). The present study described four themes that identify activities engaged in by students in field placement courses at two universities. Finally, SCOPE offers promise toward

developing behavioral objectives for a variety of field placement courses at different colleges and universities. Evidence supporting such a conclusion includes SCOPE's wide range of placement activities, its high level of reliability and content validity, and its lack of bias in identifying the activities of students having divergent geographical, cultural, and academic backgrounds, as well as students at different years in school.

Serious consideration of the proposal that undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate education for psychology practitioners be viewed as a whole (Fox, Kovacs, & Graham, 1985) requires evaluation at each educational level. Educators can only plan how the field placement course fits into the preprofessional training program after identifying the experiences that field placement provides and the behaviors and/or personal traits that field placement changes. Coordinators of field placement programs can use those findings to alter the course as different training models emerge.

Further investigation into cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences of field placement experiences would be instructive. Teachers and researchers need additional information to support or refute anecdotal reports about the influence of field placements (Allen, 1978; Kuppersmith, Blair, & Slotnick, 1977; Nish, 1979; & Yates, 1980). Longitudinal investigations could also prove valuable, for example, a follow-up survey of the career paths, satisfaction, and success of graduates who did or did not enroll in the field placement course could provide further indications about the course's influence.

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Author Notes

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Requests for copies of SCOPE and/or for reprints of this article should be sent to Mark E. Ware, Department of Psychology, Creighton University, Omaha, NE 68178.

Table 1

Items for Skills Check List of Placement Experiences

Items
1. completed a psychological test (eg. interest, ability or personality) on my own behavior.
2. obtained feedback about my performance on a psychological test.
3. delivered instructions for a group psychological test(s).
4. administered individual psychological test(s).
5. scored psychological test(s).
6. interpreted the results of a psychological test.
7. provided individual(s) with feedback of the results of a psychological test(s).
8. interacted with clients in educational activities.
9. participated with clients in recreational activities.
10. interacted with clients on field trips.
11. planned recreational, educational, or field trips with clients.
12. interviewed clients to obtain personal history or to detect personal problems.
13. observed therapy sessions.
14. participated in individual or group therapy or counseling session.

Table 1 (continued)

15. assumed sole responsibility for individual/group therapy or counseling session
16. designed or executed a personal developmental program for a client (e.g., behavior modification)
17. wrote intake interview or counseling interview report.
18. maintained or revised client files.
19. evaluated and/or revised a personal developmental program.
20. wrote recommendations about client for legal hearings.
21. participated in legal hearings or reviews for clients.
22. discussed client's progress and made recommendations to staff members.
23. attended staff meetings where client's progress were discussed.

Table 2

Items and their Loadings for the Four Factors

Factor		
client testing		
	Item	Loading
	3	.67379
	4	.80930
	5	.92605
	6	.79857
	7	.88180
therapeutic interaction		
	13	.53546
	14	.53292
	15	.74718
	16	.51220
	17	.74297
	18	.56777
	22	.63499
writing and reporting		
	19	.67466
	20	.93120
	21	.90289

Table 2 (continued)

non-therapy client interaction	
8	.70302
9	.82500
10	.69476
11	.65499

Table 3

Posttest Means and Standard Deviations for Placement and Comparison Groups

Factor	Placement (N = 38) M	SD	Comparison (N=39) M	SD
client testing	6.47	4.65	2.15	2.80
therapy interaction	7.57	3.82	2.90	3.95
writing and reporting	1.24	2.26	0.26	0.85
non therapy interaction	5.18	3.07	3.03	3.90